

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BERLIN 01600

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: CGEN, CPRS, PGOV, SCUL, GE, US
SUBJECT: FEININGER PAINTINGS AND US-GDR RELATIONS

REF: GRAY-POLANSKY TELECON MARCH 2, 1978

1. DURING MARCH 3 DINNER AND FILM-SHOWING AT RESIDENCE, I TOOK THE OCCASION TO RAISE THE MATTER OF THE FEININGER PAINTINGS WITH GDR MFA USA DIVISION CHIEF GEYER AND US DESK OFFICER ELM. I NOTED I HAD LEARNED, DURING MY RECENT CONSULTATIONS IN WASHINGTON, THAT THE US LAWYER WHO IS EXECUTOR OF THE FEININGER ESTATE HAD RECENTLY RAISED THE MATTER AGAIN WITH SENIOR DEPT OFFICIALS. HE HAD THREATENED TO DEMONSTRATE AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY'S DRESDEN ART EXHIBIT IF THE GDR DID NOT TAKE STEPS TO RELEASE THE FEININGER PAINTINGS. WE DID NOT WISH ANY EMBARRASSMENT DURING THE DRESDEN ART EXHIBIT. THIS HAD BEEN CONVEYED TO GDR AMBASSADOR SIEBER BY DEPT OFFICIALS, NOT AS A THREAT, BUT AS AN INDICATION OF OUR CONCERN ABOUT TRYING TO AVOID INCIDENTS THAT MIGHT DAMAGE US-GDR RELATIONS. IN THIS SAME SPIRIT, I WISHED TO DRAW THE MATTER TO GEYER'S ATTENTION, IN THE HOPE THAT THE ISSUE COULD BE RESOLVED BEFORE ANY UNPLEASANTNESS MIGHT TAKE PLACE. I STRESSED THAT RELEASE OF THE PAINTINGS WOULD BE A WELL-TIMED GESTURE, CERTAIN TO GENERATE GOOD PUBLICITY FOR THE GDR.

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2. GEYER AND ELM HEARD ME OUT, TOOK NOTE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MATTER IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DRESDEN ART EXHIBIT, BUT MADE NO SPECIFIC COMMENT.

3. COMMENT: WHILE WE HAVE NOW CONVEYED IN WASHINGTON AND HERE TO GDR OFFICIALS OUR HOPE THAT STEPS -- I.E. THE

RELEASE OF THE PAINTINGS -- WILL BE TAKEN BY THE GDR TO
HEAD OFF ANY POSSIBLE ANTI-GDR DEMONSTRATIONS AT
THE NATIONAL GALLERY, I AM NOT SANGUINE THAT THEY ARE PRE-
PARED TO MOVE. THEY MAY, IN THEIR OWN MINDS, ALTHOUGH THE
ISSUES ARE DIFFERENT, LINK THE RETURN OF THE FEININGER
PAINTINGS WITH THE RETURN OF THE DUERER PAINTINGS OR THE
POSTAGE STAMPS, AND MAY BE RELUCTANT TO RELEASE THE FEININ-
GER PAINTINGS UNTIL THE OTHER MATTERS ARE RESOLVED. I TEND
TO DOUBT THAT THE GDR, IF COLIN FOLLOWS THROUGH
WITH HIS INTENTION TO DEMONSTRATE, WILL BE MOVED BY SUCH
ANTI-GDR PUBLICITY, AND THE DEPT MAY WISH TO COUNSEL COLIN
TO THAT EFFECT. AS IN THE PAST, WE WILL CONTINUE TO SEEK
AND OPPORTUNITY TO RAISE THIS MATTER WITH A VIEW TO GETTING
A DEFINITIVE REPLY TO OUR AIDE MEMOIRE REQUESTING RELEASE
OF THE PAINTINGS. BOLEN

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